

[Print This Page](#)**BayArea.com**[Close window](#)

## '51 treaty hinders justice, protesters say

Published Saturday, Sept. 8, 2001, in the San Jose Mercury News  
BY SARAH LUBMAN AND JESSIE MANGALIMAN

Mercury News

Anger over Japanese wartime atrocities spilled over Friday into celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of the formal end of the Pacific war.

``Those of us who really believe in human rights believe that justice has not been achieved by the San Francisco Peace Treaty," said Lillian Sing, a San Francisco Superior Court judge who attended dueling conferences devoted to the Sept. 8, 1951, treaty and its legacy. ``The scars are very deep. We need to heal. But before we can heal, we need an apology."

The treaty that ended the war and ushered in a security alliance between Japan and the United States was the subject of passionate attack -- and equally passionate defense -- at two gatherings in downtown San Francisco and Japantown.

The downtown conference, organized by the Japan Society, celebrated the treaty and focused on the U.S.-Japan alliance that has linked the two nations since the height of the Cold War. The rival conference, hosted by the Rape of Nanking Redress Coalition and the University of California-Berkeley's Asian-American Studies program, decried the treaty as an obstacle to a full reckoning of the suffering Japan inflicted on other Asians and on American prisoners of war.

Official celebrations of the treaty anniversary culminate today with a ceremony in the San Francisco Opera House -- site of the 1951 signing -- to be attended by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Japanese Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka.

Friday, emotions ran high at the competing events, with former war victims testifying to brutality while Japanese diplomats and a former U.S. ambassador to Japan defended the treaty.

Under the 1951 agreement, the U.S. waived all claims to reparations. Several bills in Congress now seek to reopen the issue. A bill co-sponsored by Rep. Mike Honda, D-San Jose, would allow former POWs to file suit in U.S. courts against Japanese companies that used them as slave labor. Another bill in the Senate would mandate reparations to former POWs from the U.S. government.

At the Japan Society conference, Sing spoke at a standing-room-only session titled ``The Weight of History" that bordered on raucous at times, with pointed questions from the audience over whether the United States should pay reparations to blacks, American Indians and the Vietnamese if it is demanding them from Japan. Lester Tenney, an 82-year-old former POW who survived the Bataan Death March, grabbed a microphone from a woman in the audience to shout at Japanese panelists that the prevailing interpretation of the treaty is ``a

Former Ambassador Thomas Foley, who represented the United States in Japan from 1997 to 2001, made a point of recognizing Tenney and another POW in the crowd, but argued that reinterpreting the treaty would have "disastrous consequences."

"I think that would raise all kinds of questions about the word of the U.S. and our effectiveness around the world," he said.

### **Sympathy for suffering**

A Japanese diplomat expressed his personal sympathy to war victims, especially POWs, but said Japan had already apologized for its actions. "It is unfortunately impossible to completely redress such human suffering," said Ichiro Komatsu, minister of political affairs at the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Honda said in an earlier interview that his proposed legislation is about giving former POWs their due, not punishing Japan.

"This bill is not about Japan-bashing; it's not about being anti-Japanese or anti-Asian," Honda said. "This is about POWs who are all aging and dying. They need to have at least a right to retain their dignity."

Ten blocks north of the official treaty conference, hundreds of people gathered at the Radisson Miyako Hotel in Japantown to give their own views on the anniversary. A coalition of human rights activists, war victims and former POWs listed 10 demands, including an official Japanese apology and compensation; the creation of a memorial museum in Tokyo for Asian war victims, and the outlawing of honoring of "war criminals" at Japan's Yasukuni Shrine.

But historians and legal scholars said pressure must be applied on the United States as well.

"Japan's historical amnesia is a result of collusion between the U.S. and Japan," Mark Selden, a history professor at the State University of New York in Binghamton, said in opening remarks. "That collusion reached its height in the San Francisco Treaty of 1951."

Japanese-Americans also have an important role to play in persuading the Japanese government to make reparations, said Ronald Takaki, a professor of Asian American Studies at UC-Berkeley.

"I don't think Japanese-Americans can sit on the fence on this issue and say it's an international issue," Takaki said. "Japanese-Americans need to speak on the principle of justice just as they spoke out against their own government on the issue of reparations after the internment."

The issues of apology and reparations are gaining support within Japan, according to Koken Tsuchiya, former president of the Tokyo-based All Japan Confederation of Bar Associations. Tsuchiya also heads a group in Japan that is seeking government compensation for tens of thousands of so-called comfort women -- girls and women from Korea, Burma (Myanmar), the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia who were forced into sexual slavery for Japanese soldiers during the war.

### **'Distorted history'**

"The Japanese government is trying to hide history and teach young people a distorted history and evade its responsibility," Tsuchiya said, standing beside a grisly exhibit called "Testimony to a Massacre" -- a stark contrast to the three pictures of Russians protesting the peace treaty that were on display at the official

conference.

The Japantown exhibit featured 58 wartime photographs showing emaciated American POWs, a pile of disembodied heads of Nanjing residents, Japanese soldiers armed with swords or bayonets preparing to disembowel or behead Chinese civilians, and comfort women -- naked, abused, dead. The photographs were propped like tombstones on a large felt square, with a battery-powered candle placed before each one. Taped testimonials by war victims, Japanese soldiers, comfort women and POWs played in the background.

Said Tsuchiya, ``When I see these photographs, and see the Japanese soldiers with bayonets in their hands committing atrocities, it makes me feel as if I'm doing these things myself."

# # #